

# The Democrats keep on drifting —not right, not left, just away

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

**A**FTER DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE MICHAEL Dukakis lost 40 states to George Bush last November, Democrats fell into a deep depression. But the Democrats recovered when they realized that they had not only held Congress, but had increased their margin in the Senate. When the administration stumbled in its first two months, the Democrats in Congress asserted themselves—blocking the nomination of former Sen. John Tower to be secretary of defense and winning administration agreement to phase out the contras in Nicaragua. But now as Congress returns from its summer recess, Democrats are back in the doldrums.

The congressional Democrats appear passive and confused—without a positive legislative agenda. The Democratic congressional committees and the Democratic National Committee are in the throes of a fundraising crisis—a product of pessimism about the party's future. Potentially strong candidates are bowing out of 1990 Senate races. And opinion polls are showing a marked shift toward the Republican Party, particularly in the South.

**Capitol losses:** In Congress, the Democrats have not been able to develop a legislative agenda that plays to the party's political

strengths. The Democrats acquiesced to the Bush administration's plan to make taxpayers rather than bankers foot the bill for the savings and loan bailout. Now House Democrats appear ready to accept a version of Bush's proposal to lower capital gains taxes.

During the presidential campaign, Bush had pledged to reduce capital gains tax rates from 28 percent to 15 percent. This kind of cut would undermine the anti-loophole 1986 tax reform, which made capital gains taxable

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at the same rate as any other income. It would also favor the rich. According to a study by the Joint Committee on Taxation, four-fifths of capital gains savings accrue to the wealthiest 5 percent of the population.

Democrats maintained a united front against Bush's proposal until June, when Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL), the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, buckled. Concerned about reducing deficits, he was impressed by the idea that in its first two years the Bush reduction would increase rather than decrease revenues by encouraging a rash of assets sales. Rostenkowski announced that he would be open to a compromise on the Bush proposal.

When the new House leadership of Speaker Tom Foley (D-WA) and Majority Leader Dick Gephardt (D-MO) reproached him for breaking ranks, Rostenkowski backed down, but the damage was already done. In Rostenkowski's committee, conservative Georgia Democrat Ed Jenkins won the support of other southern Democrats for a compromise that would reduce capital gains taxes from 28 to 19 percent for two years. The administration applauded Jenkins' compromise, and Rostenkowski acknowledged that with Republican backing, Jenkins' proposal stood a good chance of passing his committee and the House.

Jenkins' proposal makes even less sense than Bush's original plan. While one could argue that an unconditional reduction of capital gains tax rates would encourage investors to take risks they might otherwise forgo, Jenkins' two-year window of opportunity would merely encourage investors to unload their assets while they were taxable at lower rates, discouraging rather than encouraging new investments. Its only virtue was to increase revenues temporarily and to gladden local coupon-clippers.

By promoting this kind of policy, Democrats not only hurt the economy, but they also subvert their strongest political appeal: that the Democrats are the party of the middle and working classes and the Republicans are the party of the rich.

**Weak leaders:** The Democrats' acceptance of Republican economic policy stems partly from their lack of national leadership. The party has no national leader. Dukakis is in disgrace even in his own state. New York's Gov. Mario Cuomo continues to be coy, the Rev. Jesse Jackson is busy putting the squeeze on Washington Mayor Marion Barry, and Democratic National Chairman Ron Brown is preoccupied with trying to convince wealthy Democrats he is not a pawn of Jackson. In Congress, the situation has reached crisis proportions.

In the House, Democrats lost two of their most effective leaders, Speaker Jim Wright (D-TX) and Majority Whip Tony Coelho (D-CA). Both men were tainted by scandal, yet Wright knew how to wield power and Coelho was the party's most effective fundraiser. Earlier this summer Rep. Mickey Leland, an important bridge between white moderates and the most militant blacks, died in a plane crash. And now Barney Frank (D-MA), one of the Democrats' most effective public spokesmen and a brilliant legislator, has been hurt by a sex scandal. Even if Frank chooses to run for office again and wins re-election, his influence will be greatly diminished.

As a group, the new House leaders are not as effective as the old. Speaker Tom Foley (D-WA) is a conciliator and compromiser who has not stood up to Democratic conservatives or to the Republican opposition. During a press conference on August 24, Foley criticized the capital gains tax cut for favoring the wealthy. Then he added in typical fashion, "I'm perfectly prepared to be convinced to the contrary." The Democrats' strongest leader is Majority Leader Gephardt, but on Gephardt's key trade issues he is opposed by Foley, an ardent free trader who represents a rural agricultural district.

In the Senate, George Mitchell (D-ME) has proved to be a more effective public spokesman than former Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-WV), but Mitchell's forte is articulating positions that the majority has already developed. He would function best with a Democrat in the White House whose pro-

## The new Democratic House leadership is weaker than the old one. The party is short of money, ideas and strong candidates. The abortion issue is its only plus.

gram he could promote. And now that arms control is no longer a central issue, Majority Whip Alan Cranston is a liability. During the S&L debate, Cranston's contribution was to try to make the bill more palatable to the California bankers who had helped precipitate the crisis.

**Money and candidates:** As the Democrats look toward the 1990 congressional elections, they find themselves being out-gunned by the Republicans in money and candidates. All the Democratic committees lag far behind their Republican counterparts. For the first five months of this year, the Democratic National Committee raised \$2.484 million and the Republican National Committee \$12.933 million, or more than five times the Democratic total. The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee raised \$2.69 million, compared to the National Republican Senatorial Committee's \$15.849 million.

The Democrats are also having trouble recruiting strong candidates to take on Republican incumbents or to contest open seats

in the 1990 Senate elections, when 16 Democratic and 18 Republican seats will be up. In North Carolina, former Gov. Jim Hunt has rejected a rematch against Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC). In Minnesota, former Vice President Walter Mondale turned down a campaign against Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (R-MN). In Colorado, former Gov. Richard Lamm would not run for the Senate seat vacated by Sen. William Armstrong (R-CO). All these potential Democratic candidates were running ahead in the polls.

Perhaps most telling, neither Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-IN) nor Rep. Jim Jontz (D-IN) are willing to challenge Sen. Dan Coats, a political featherweight who was appointed to fill Sen. Dan Quayle's Indiana Senate seat. As the *Cook Political Report* points out, six of the last nine appointed senators have lost their re-election bids.

On the other side, Republicans are fielding strong candidates against Democratic candidates. Rep. Lynn Martin (R-IL) is challenging Illinois Sen. Paul Simon, Rep. Tom Tauke (R-IA) is taking on Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin, and Rep. Claudine Schneider is running against Rhode Island Sen. Claiborne Pell. The arithmetic is ominous. The Democrats must win seats in 1990, because in 1992 they face a situation where they are going to have to defend the majority they barely won in 1986, when there was no presidential contest to help the Republicans.

The Democrats have also not been doing well on other fronts. This year 128 elected officials in the South have switched from being Democrats to Republicans, including two congressmen. After winning the first two congressional races in Alabama and Indiana, the Democrats have lost two in a row, most recently the August 27 race to fill Rep. Claude Pepper's Miami seat.

Finally, the polls do not look good for the party. Democrats for the '90s, a Washington group, commissioned an extensive survey of voter attitudes toward the two parties. According to the unpublished survey, a copy of which *In These Times* obtained, 37 percent of voters think of themselves as Democratic, 30 percent as Republican and 29 percent as independent. But the two parties are at parity among whites, and Republicans hold an almost two-to-one edge among white voters under age 35.

The survey also found that voters by 43 to 34 percent said they trusted the Republican Party more than the Democratic Party to "lead the country." Voters also held a 43 percent positive to 21 percent negative opinion of the Republicans, while holding a 34 percent positive to 27 percent negative opinion of the Democrats. In short, in all except overt party identification, the Republicans now have an edge.

The Democrats' only bright spot is an unexpected one: abortion. In this year's two main races, the New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial contests, the Supreme Court's decision in *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* has benefited Democratic pro-choice candidates running against Republican pro-life candidates. But the abortion debate runs across class and party lines, and if Democrats began beating pro-life Republicans, anti-abortion Republicans will begin fudging their own positions.

If the Democrats are to survive and grow, they must re-establish themselves as the party of the middle class and the Republicans as the tribunes of the rich. The Democrats can't do this while promoting a tax cut that will benefit only the top 1 percent of Americans. □

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By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

**R**ICHARD ULLMAN'S ARTICLE ON "THE SECRET French Connection" in this summer's issue of *Foreign Policy* had the ingredients to explode official myths surrounding the French nuclear *force de frappe*. French officials and media hastened to defuse the bombshell by playing down the revelations. As a result there was no immediate explosion of scandal. But the story remains a time bomb.

Ullman, a Princeton professor of international relations who worked on the policy planning staff of the Pentagon and the National Security Council in the '60s, revealed what he called "the best-kept secret" in Washington: a close Franco-U.S. nuclear cooperation that began in 1961, was interrupted when Charles de Gaulle took France out of the NATO military command in 1966, resumed in 1972 and was strengthened in the '80s under Francois Mitterrand.

To get around laws banning sharing of nuclear secrets, Americans let French weapons designers play "20 questions" to get them on the right track of weapons innovations, Ullman said. The French in return agreed to plan Soviet targets jointly, thus letting themselves be drawn back into the NATO military command they still officially refuse to rejoin.

From a legalistic American point of view, the main scandal is that this cooperation was apparently against the law, because Congress had authorized nuclear cooperation only with Britain. From a French point of view, the scandal is the loss of credibility of the much-vaunted independence of the nuclear deterrent that a generation of political leaders have claimed guaranteed France's independence—from the Americans, among others.

The broader geopolitical and strategic scandal, however, is much worse.

**Coup of the decade:** The Ullman revelations confirm the "Gaullist" policy option taken by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in 1972, when looming defeat in Vietnam led them to seek military surrogates. Kissinger's biggest coup was the alliance with China against the Russians at the expense of the Vietnamese. This most cynical of all real-politik coups allowed the U.S. to abandon Vietnam, while China took up the harassment of that unfortunate country by arming fanatical Maoist Cambodians (Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge) to strike across the border in the late '70s, provoking the Vietnamese invasion and keeping Indochina in turmoil to this day. China justified this reversal of alliances by adopting the doctrine identifying Soviet "hegemonism" as "enemy No. 1."

The opposite number of the Nixon-Kissinger China gambit was a much less ambitious French maneuver. France, like China, is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, which are also the five overt nuclear powers. In the '60s, France, like China, had broken with its "superpower," although in an incomparably less concrete and more purely rhetorical way.

In January 1968 de Gaulle made a startling speech to his war college, pointing to the world's political uncertainties (who will govern the U.S. or the USSR in 20 years time? he asked) and concluding that France's nuclear retaliation capacity must be pointed "in all directions." The French expression used by de Gaulle, *tous azimuts*, was odd enough to catch on. More often than not, it

## U.S. nuclear policy hides an old French connection



Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon: playing nuclear footsie with France.

was used ironically, hinting at the general's unlimited pretensions.

Within half a year de Gaulle was shaken by May 1968, and 15 months later he resigned as president of the Fifth Republic. *Tous azimuts* never really got off the ground.

Still, the Gaullist claims to total French national independence had created a rhetorical standard that other French politicians

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had to keep up or risk appearing servile to the American superpower. It has remained habitual for French leaders to stress the independence of France's nuclear defense. For the president, his sole access to the nuclear doomsday button makes him the very embodiment of national sovereignty and greatly enhances his domestic prestige.

Perhaps more than most other American leaders, Nixon and Kissinger knew not to take mere words too seriously. They saw, first, that an "independent" French force needn't necessarily be independent, and second, that the illusion of its independence could be a useful card in European politics.

In the early '70s, the U.S. was negotiating arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. The principle had to be parity between the two superpowers. But the U.S.-Soviet symmetry was in fact accompanied by a major strategic asymmetry: while the U.S. had no major nuclear adversary other than the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union had to think about a hostile China to the East and two nuclear NATO countries, Britain in France, in the West.

The U.S. could obviously not be held responsible for China. And thanks to the

worldwide renown of Gaullist rhetoric, it might not be held responsible for France either. Thus as the U.S. cut back its NATO nuclear commitments in balanced agreements with Moscow, France could be building up "independent" nuclear forces to take their place.

This, anyway, is what has been happening. Under the label of "modernizing," France has been expanding its nuclear arsenal, while refusing to take part in nuclear disarmament negotiations between the superpowers.

In December 1987 in Washington, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachov signed the treaty getting rid of their land-based intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF). This outlawed all land-based nuclear missiles of a range between 500 kilometers (310 miles) and 5,000 kilometers (3,100 kilometers)—so long as they are American or Soviet. French, Chinese and Israeli missiles are not covered.

**Behind closed doors:** Ullman discloses that the U.S. helped France develop miniature warheads and independently targetable multiple warheads. In return, French presidents and commanders agreed to coordinate target plans. This information about targeting is particularly significant because it tends to rule out any possible independent French use of its "independent" *force de frappe*.

The French deterrence doctrine has always remained deliberately vague, the better to deter. The official Gaullist doctrine is that the *force de frappe* is only to deter a Soviet violation of French territory, and not for use inside NATO to fight battles over Germany. The idea is that France could destroy enough of the Soviet Union—at least several cities—

to cancel any Soviet gains from conquering France. This is called *la défense du faible au fort*—defense of the weak from the strong.

An alternative and older doctrine that integrated the French force into the defense of Europe, but in a bizarre and necessarily sneaky way, was the "trigger" doctrine. This was developed by General André Beaufre in the early '60s, in response to the new U.S. "flexible response," interpreted in Paris as a de facto withdrawal of the French strategic nuclear umbrella in favor of a nuclear battlefield in Europe. The idea was that in case the Americans refused to use their strategic forces to counter a Soviet invasion, the relatively small French force could serve as a "trigger" to set off a strategic nuclear exchange between the superpowers.

It could do that best, of course, if it could fire missiles from its nuclear submarines in such a way that nobody could be sure who fired.

An interesting detail of recent revelations about Franco-U.S. cooperation is that the U.S. has refused to help France with technology to make nuclear submarines more silent. Keeping track of the French subs is also a measure of protection against the "trigger." Obviously, American strategists cannot seriously encourage a French strategy aimed at forcing the U.S. into a doomsday nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union it prefers to avoid.

Finally, the U.S. is getting ready to introduce a completely new electronic Air Command and Control System (ACCS) into European NATO in the '90s. France has no early-warning system of its own and has to depend on information passed along from the U.S. Last February Mitterrand agreed to open negotiations with NATO for France to take part in ACCS. Meanwhile, the French are developing the short-range Hades missile that, despite its formal appellation of "pre-strategic," is a battlefield weapon. The ongoing French nuclear weapons testing at Mururoa in the South Pacific aims at miniaturization. Whatever it's called, the French program is becoming more and more of a surrogate for the Americans in Europe—under U.S. control.

**Calm after the storm:** In the current political torpor in France, Ullman's disclosures caused no visible ripple. The leftist weekly *Politis* ran a cover story, using a copy of the 1961 Franco-U.S. accord obtained in Washington. In France, such texts simply are not to be found. *Politis* wondered whether more than \$6 billion a year wasn't too much to pay for a myth.

Even on the left, criticism is on grounds of national independence. *Politis* saw the Ullman article as part of a U.S. political strategy: the Americans would certainly like "to be able to count the French *force de frappe* in East-West negotiations. That would allow Washington to resume leadership in Europe, thus justifying its armaments projects like SDI, the sinister Star Wars."

Which Americans are *Politis* talking about? Those who seriously want to pursue disarmament with Moscow must eventually think of including the French forces, one way or another.

On the other hand, all-too-clever strategists in the Nixon-Kissinger tradition may think that it is fine to go on flattering the French fiction of total independence, while using the *force de frappe* as a nuclear wild card in the game with Moscow. □

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